SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION
BULLETIN
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W. 2. *By* LUCIEN LABAUDT.

United States Contemporary Section, Golden Gate International Exposition.

American Art Progress

By GLENN WESSELS

ANY ATTEMPT accurately to sum up art tendencies at the present moment, whether in San Francisco or in the whole of the United States, is doomed to failure. We cannot see the outlines of a mountain when we are laboring up one of its slopes. There is so very much going on right under our noses that it is impossible to get a broad view. Nevertheless, it is profitable at times to stop for breath and to speculate as to the nature of the path immediately ahead on the basis of experiences with the path passed over. Writing and talking about art are very apt to be like rowing a boat: we see nothing ahead and only what's been left behind. What's been left behind is only useful if it helps us to prognosticate as to the future.

The biggest art event of our time has been *the discovery of the artists in America*, not the discovery of American art. The American artist is, according to Forbes Watson, simply the artist who, being of this country, went to the life he knew for his material. Because of this discovery, material support for American artists working in America has increased. Note that there is a difference between spending money on art in America and translating that money into food for the artists working in America. American generosity toward art has gone on for a long time, but it has largely occupied itself as does the rower of the rowboat: in looking back. Until it became comparatively easy for a working artist to live in America he worked elsewhere. When America

became less expensive than Paris for American artists, they began to live here, and immediately discovered that American silos and barns were as fine subject matter as French backyards. The surprise did not come to the artists, for most of them knew that the "American Scene" contained perfectly good painting material, but to the public, who were intrigued to see themselves immortalized in paint. As is the general rule among artistic people, necessity became a virtue, and for a time the use of the "American Scene" for painting material was enough to bring a painting attention and its painter money—often beyond his just deserts. Now we are coming to see a little more clearly that neither American nor European subject matter can alone make a good painting. There is at present a little less self-consciousness about the American scene, and a growing emphasis upon the fundamental principles of painting.

The somewhat uncharacteristic trait of introspection is being cultivated by American artists, and instead of painting objects and appearances, we are symbolizing feelings and objectifying ideas. In this we are belatedly, but the more sincerely, following the art trend of all but the dictator countries of the world. But this time we are consciously aping no one. We are trying to be ourselves.

Not so long ago American art was an objective art. We painted and chose to admire pictures of things we could taste, smell, touch—so-called real things. We were materialists, and the painting of materialists like ourselves most appealed to us. Dutch painting and English painting in celebration of the real qualities of fine stuffs, fine foods and handsome ladies, filled our collections. Today we, as represented by the juries of our chief painting exhibitions throughout the country, are admiring stylized, symbolic, semi- or entirely abstract and intellectual compositions. Our greatest esthetic sin at present is the confusion of deep feeling with sentimentality and drama with melodrama. We are going out for emotion, and in not a few cases future generations will find us a little ridiculous and smile at our extravagances as we smile at the sensational didoes of the lesser French Romanticists. But this should not upset us too much, for we are on the trail of an important something that has long been abnormally missing, missing even from the most worthwhile painting. This important something we find in the work of the pre-Hitler German expressionists, but we find them more tragically violent about it than we shall ever want to be.

This is a safe generality about most of those of our paintings that are not entirely abstract: they are either sentimental or melodramatic. In reaction to this most of our abstractionists are squeezing out all but construction—and are thus truly dealing with nothing but the dry bones of art. Perhaps these are the reasons why we gave Georges Braque of France the top prize in the Unrestricted Division at the Golden Gate International Exposition. His work stands almost alone in its successful unification of the most evident objectives of present-day American painting: it is abstract, but it is emotional, and it is emotional without being sentimental. It is scientific without smelling of machines and laboratories. This abstraction somehow retains the breath of life.

The first prize award in the United States Division, by Yasuo Kuniyoshi, has much of the same quality, but here the discipline of style is not quite so sure. The painter expresses no more, and with less restraint. Max Beckmann's coldly angry "Temptation," which took first prize in the Foreign Division, speaks of feelings as yet foreign to us. For no American painting anywhere, not even the most violent of our paintings in criticism of society, achieves its disciplined, bitter tragedy. Undue violence in American painting finds itself in the realm of caricature, and its force explodes harmlessly in laughter. We are not yet able to sustain such moods as are Beckmann's. We are like small children play-acting murder: we burst into laughter at the wrong moments.

But satire we can take, and of it we take a great deal. Wry humor, sentimentality and an enormous interest in construction: these are our present-day artistic characteristics—if we can say that we have any distinctive artistic characteristics at all.

Most of the works done by artists in the various Government-patronized art agencies exhibit one or the other of these important tendencies. One has only to walk through the American rooms at the Fair to see that the same interests dominate here also.

But in a great many of the works there is a tremendous, groping uncertainty, as though the artist was seeking and not finding. Within a single canvas we see his tentative progress toward a given esthetic position which when reached is immediately abandoned. Styles and mannerisms—often good in themselves—are combined in one painting in such a way as to negate each other's effect. It is as though the painters were growing so quickly that their own spiritual good health was endangered; as though they were dashing breathlessly for a goal that is too far away to be achieved except

(Concluded on Page 6)

Path of Darkness. *By* LULU HAWKINS BRAGHETTA.
Detail of Bas Relief, Towers of the East, Golden Gate International Exposition.

Museum Workers Welcomed

SAN FRANCISCO seems very far distant to the Easterner who thinks of Chicago as "the West." In the Museum world, though workers from the Pacific Coast go East fairly frequently, it is ordinarily rare to have any considerable number of professional visitors from the Atlantic Coast and the Middle West out here. The Museum professionals of San Francisco found it, therefore, a novelty, and a very great pleasure, to welcome a great number of Art Museum people here during late June at the three annual meetings, respectively of the Association of Art Museum Directors, of the American Association of Museums, and of the Western Association of Art Museum Directors.

The Association of Art Museum Directors met Saturday and Sunday, June 24th and 25th, to discuss the problems which most concern heads of Museums. Composed of directors of Museums with budgets of over $50,000 a year, it includes representatives of all the large art institutions of the country.

(Continued on Page 5, Col. 2)

Mural Competition

Announcement has been received of a *Special 48-State Mural Competition*, open to all American artists. This is for one mural painting in each of the 48 Post Office Buildings listed in Bulletin No. 19 of the Section of Fine Arts, Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, now on file in the office of the San Francisco Museum of Art.

The following painters have consented to act as an advisory jury to select 48 designs, one for each of the post offices in the competition: Maurice Sterne of San Francisco, Henry Varnum Poor of New York, Olin Dows of Rhinebeck, Edgar Miller of Chicago.

Designs must be submitted with carrying charges prepaid to: Section of Fine Arts, Procurement Division, 7th and D Streets, S. W., Washington, D. C., on or before October 2, 1939.

After the awards have been made all designs will be returned to the artists C.O.D.

Further information is available at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

San Francisco Art Association Bulletin

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Montalvo Dedicated

THE MONTALVO FOUNDATION of the San Francisco Art Association was dedicated to its new purpose on the afternoon of Saturday, July 29th. Invited to be present at the ceremonies were the Boards of Directors of the San Francisco Art Association and the San Francisco Museum of Art, the faculty of the Art School and members and prospective members of the Montalvo Society, which forms, for the present, the major activity of the Montalvo Foundation.

The old estate of the late Senator Phelan was especially charming on the afternoon of the dedication. The red eucalyptus are now at the peak of their beauty, magnolias are in full bloom and the orchards well laden with ripening fruit.

The house has been renovated and refurnished in excellent taste. There has been little structural change but the redecoration has wrought a remarkable transformation. Mrs. Anne Bailhache, Resident Director of Montalvo, deserves congratulations on her very fine judgment in the selection of color and fabrics.

The main dwelling contained nineteen rooms and eight bathrooms, with an attached servants' wing of eleven small rooms and four baths. This has been reconditioned to provide facilities for a Concert and Lecture Hall, Social Hall, Dining Room, Conference Room, Gallery, Resident Director's Suite and three guest apartments. The former guest house, close by, has been partitioned into four studio suites each consisting of a studio-living room, a bedroom, bathroom and kitchenette. Rooms are arranged for the future establishment of three studios in the servants' wing. Architect's plans for a Little Theater, a Music Center, a Music Cottage and typical studio cottage are in readiness.

The program of dedication included brief talks by Mr. Wm. Gerstle and Mrs. Bailhache. The highlight of the afternoon was the Budapest String Quartet's sympathetic rendering of Beethoven's Quartet in E Minor and Schubert's D Minor (Death and the Maiden) Quartet. To Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who made this possible, the Montalvo Foundation is indebted.

As we sat in the patio listening to the exquisite rendering of this beautiful music, it seemed to us unfortunate that the empty steps and lawns were not occupied by members of the Art Association, who were conspicuously absent. In an estate covering 225 acres there seemed little need of exclusiveness.

The Montalvo Foundation, as outlined in its prospectus, contains great possibilities. It has every chance of becoming one of THE important art centers in America. There are, however, many avenues along which its chief purpose may be directed. If Senator Phelan's idea be interpreted to mean primarily the establishing of a cultural and educational center for the environs of Montalvo, its program, as launched, may be considered a splendid beginning. If, on the other hand, the chief objective of the late Senator's dream was to provide for the artists a sanctum, thus far obtainable in no other way, the dedication ceremony was short-sighted.

In considering the former, interesting as it unquestionably is, the close proximity of Stanford University immediately depreciates its necessity. Regarding the latter, those of us close to artists' problems recognize the immediate need and tremendous influence that Montalvo could serve.

Montalvo has, for years, been the center of earnest discussion, not only among the artists of the Art Association, but also in the sessions of the Artists' Council, where the original plans for its development were suggested. Like most projects worthy of being undertaken, it has advanced far beyond its original conception. In order to properly function it has become a separate entity completely divorced from Art Association management. It is right that this should be so. There is, however, a definite spiritual relationship between the Art Association and Montalvo that it would be unwise to destroy. To many artists of the Art Association the policy of the Montalvo Committee, as evidenced in the dedication exercises, is disappointing. An endeavor to obliterate the cause of this unfortunate reaction should be made at this time. M.R.

Dr. Morley Re-elected

Dr. Grace Morley has recently been elected to the Council of the American Association of Museums, the national professional society of museum workers.

She was also re-elected for third term President of Western Association of Art Museum Directors.

Portland Exhibition

A prospectus has been received of the *8th Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* to be held at the Portland Art Museum, October 21st to November 19th.

The calendar is as follows: Last day to return entry blanks—Saturday, September 30. Work must be at Portland Art Museum by Friday, October 6.

All paintings must be suitably framed and each artist is limited to three entries. All work must be sent prepaid. The Museum will offer three prizes: First, $100; second, $50; third, $25. Entry blanks at S. F. Museum of Art.

Art School Opens August 14th

THE California School of Fine Arts opens its Regular Session Fall Semester on Monday, August 14th, with a reorganized program of courses in the fine and applied arts and several new members on the faculty.

Meeting the rapidly growing demand for mural decoration, the course this year will cover a wide variety of media, and will be given by that capable artist, Jose Moya Del Pino, a new member of the faculty. The school regrets in this connection to lose Victor Arnautoff, who finds himself fully occupied in teaching at Stanford University and his own active work as a painter.

William Gaw will add a new course in water color painting and drawing, and Jane Berlandina Howard will resume her series of lectures on the History of Art.

A feature of this year's program is a three-year professional course in Interior Decoration which incorporates the recommendations for such training, made this Spring, by the American Institute of Decorators. The new instructor, Ada Adams Renshaw, is a graduate of the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, and a former teacher of their Paris branch. Miss Renshaw will collaborate with Miss Marian Hartwell, instructor in design. A special course in the same subject will be given in Night School by Charles Gassion, distinguished French decorator and designer.

The work in Ceramics will be taken over this year by Frank A. Smith, who has had extensive experience in many forms of pottery in Southern California and now conducts a ceramic studio across the Bay.

The childrens' Saturday classes which have produced such interesting results, will be augmented with work in modeling and pottery by Ruth Cravath Wakefield. L.R.

Museum Workers Welcomed

(Continued from Page 3, Col. 1)

The American Association of Museums met June 26th, 27th, and 28th. The opening session was held at the *San Francisco Museum of Art* Monday morning, with a very lively series of papers on "Interpretation Through Exhibits," an examination of means of teaching art through museum displays. The welcome address was made by Mr. W. W. Crocker, President of the San Francisco Museum of Art. Eugen Neuhaus of the University of California, and Director of the University Art Gallery, Laurance P. Roberts, Director of the Brooklyn Museum, Richard E. Fuller, Director of the Seattle Museum, and Alfred Neumeyer, Director of the Mills College Art Gallery, spoke. Mr. Taylor's brilliant paper on the Social and Intellectual Responsibilities of the Museums, a preliminary report of the Committee on Museum Education, summed up the various points of view and was stimulating in its suggestions for development.

The afternoon was given to sections for the various types of museums and museum work, the science and superintendents' meetings at the Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park, the Education section and Registrars' section at the de Young Museum. Evening sessions on Public Relations and on children's Museums were held at the St. Francis Hotel. Tuesday was spent at the Exposition with a general session devoted to science museums at Pacific House in the morning, and the Art Museums section in the Fine Arts Building in the afternoon surveying the relation of art and museums and Expositions.

Wednesday was given to a trip about the Bay Region. A banquet terminated the meeting. Major Charles Kendrick, Trustee of the Museum of Art, and of the Art Association, spoke on *San Francisco and Art*, and Dr. Stephen Pepper, Chairman of the Art Department of the University of California, spoke on the *Layman and Art*.

The Western Association of Art Museum Directors met the following two days to schedule exhibition circuits for the next year throughout the Far West, and to discuss problems common to all museums of this region.

It is good and encouraging for museum people to meet, exchange notes, experiences and observations, and only by knowing the art of the distant spots as well as the art of their own community can they truly know American art of today.

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American Art Progress

(Continued from Page 2)

by calm, plodding progress. There is a dearth of completely digested ideas, of completely developed themes, of completely perfected styles. There is a great deal of wallowing impatience and hence of witting or unwitting plagiarism. It is as though these men were in too much of a hurry to stop to find their own way, so they incontinently rush off on someone else's.

Where are the original American painters? the painters who have discovered themselves? the painters who know that they must rediscover the whole tradition of art within themselves and who at the same time know that they can never be successfully anything else than original? Where are the painters who, with passionate persistence, purify their own vision, and who carefully and comprehendingly exact from each observation of nature and every contemplation of idea its tribute to their own creation?

False spontaneity is worse than none. and spontaneous effusions are false unless grounded upon a solid base of mastery. The force of an epigram is not achieved without the slow, conscious or unconscious distillation of essences from essentials. Perhaps it would be a good thing for a great many American painters to keep their paintings in their studios longer—to live with their own work for a while before they expect others to try it.

But whether we do this now or at some future time, we will eventually come to it. The sketchy haste with which hopeful masterpieces were dashed out in the easel painting past is retarded. Many kinds of efficient brakes are being applied. Within the last few years more American painters than ever before have come under the discipline and constraint of monumental painting. Frightened into indiscretions by the first great walls set before them, American painters are contemplating the future walls more carefully. Mosaic, enameled steel and fresco are not handled so easily nor so lightly. The chastening effect of such technics upon the approach of American artists to their work cannot be calculated. *The WPA Federal Art Project* alone has executed over thirteen hundred monumental works in the past three years. This is only part of the reintegration of fine art with craftsmanship, which will continue to be a deterrent upon undue haste. Increasingly art schools, Government art centers and museums are catering to the interests of the careful handworker.

The limitations and exigencies of graphic art are also having their effect upon the American artist. Only *Federal Art Project* figures are available, but one may imagine that their production of eighty-five thousand prints in lithography, etching, wood-engraving and allied medit will have its effect.

The bringing of the American artist into the public eye has disciplined him in another way. As a public servant he finds himself with sobering responsibilities, responsibilities which cause him to think twice about ideas and actions which would have seemed quite reasonable while he was a lonely resident of the ivory tower—or the attic bedroom. What were mistaken for inspirations are sometimes discovered under the new circumstances of work to be merely unimportant personal abberations. The immense amount of co-operative effort required in the execution of such works as—let use say, San Francisco's Aquatic Park, the Beach Chalet, or Herman Volz' huge murals for the Federal Building at the Fair—has done its part in the creation of a new discipline.

All these things point to more self-discipline in the American painting of the future. Concepts will be more carefully considered, preliminary sketches by the hundreds will take the place of preliminary sketches by tens. A different kind of artist, a man more like the research engineer-artist of the Renaissance, will come out of it all. He will be a man of knowledge and daring, as brave an adventurer as any empire maker or forty-niner, and as surely grounded in his profession as any bridge builder. Such men are already busy in the American arts and the time is not far off when they will be the rule instead of the exception.